

## **Captain Larry Walker**

### **Memorial Service**

**December 30, 2010**

**Text: First John 4:16b-21**

I first met Larry Walker sitting at the bar at M and M's restaurant in 1998. We became friends immediately. For the past twelve years, Larry has been an important part of my life, and my wife Elizabeth's life, and I know that this is true of many of you who have gathered here this morning. **We loved Larry.** Yes, he could be difficult at times...Everyone knew where Larry stood on the most controversial issues of our day, but he was "difficult" *with a smile*. At the core, Larry was a lover, not a fighter.

Larry grew up in New Jersey under less than ideal circumstances. Some of the stories he would share with me about his childhood could bring me to tears. His family life was dysfunctional, but he would never allow the truth of his difficult circumstances to interfere with who he would become. After high school Larry enlisted in the Navy, serving on both the U.S.S. Nashville, and the U.S.S. Huntington. Larry was an engineer—a "SNIPE" serving below deck. Following his years in the Navy, Larry went to college, majoring in Accounting. He received his M.B.A. from Rutgers University in New Jersey, and began, in his words, "to make money." His interest in boating had its genesis during his Navy years, but, again, in his words, "I really got the bug when I would go out on a boat with a father and son I knew through my business connections in New Jersey" Throughout Larry's boating career he owned 10 or so boats, mostly motor driven vessels. In his office there is a picture of his favorite boat, a 52 foot cruiser, that he would dock here in Oriental while cruising the ICW.

One afternoon in 1998, Larry was sitting in his home in New Jersey, and made the decision to move to Oriental. When I asked him, "Why Oriental?" Larry would respond, "Because I loved the town from my cruising days, and the people were always kind." And so, Oriental became Larry's home, and the place where he would live out the last chapter of his life...***and what a chapter it was!***

Beginning his life in Oriental, he was first a salesman at Deaton Yachts, where he worked alongside his dear friend, Jack Coulter. Later he began his business, **World Wide Marine Training**, where he could live out his passion for teaching. His business grew rapidly, and before long he was hiring new staff, holding classes all over the coast of North Carolina, around the Great Lakes, Lake Texhoma, out where I have a home, and Grafton, Illinois along the Mississippi River. As his co-workers—his family in business will testify, Larry was a celebrity every where he would go and teach—the center of the

party—the host extraordinaire.

As for spiritual matters, Larry was a seeker on a spiritual quest. He loved discussions concerning the Bible, God, Jesus and anything related to religion. He was not a regular church-going religious person, in the traditional sense, but he was certainly spiritual. A few years ago, Larry told me that he was trying to attend every church in Pamlico County. I went with him to one of these churches, and he sat through the worship service like an eager little boy, soaking up as much inspiration as he could. He informed me before we went that I should take enough money for *three* offerings, because the last church he had attended they had three, and he was caught up short!

Just this last October, Larry called me at my office in Oklahoma City and wanted to talk with me about spirituality. We were on the phone together for two hours, and afterward he sent me a 4 page email outlining everything that we had discussed. He was meticulous! I was reminded of this phone conversation when my good friend Buddy Floyd told me of Larry's passing. In the end, Larry's physical body could no longer hold his adventurous spirit. He left this earthly life doing what he loved...In fact, he said that if he was going to die, he hoped that it would be while he was diving...

As we have come here to celebrate Larry's life, we are confronted with the fact of our own humanity, and the truth that on this earth there is life and there is death. As we sort out all of the implications of such a reality, the memories come to us in a flood—the memories of a man whose giant physical presence will be missed by all who knew him and loved him.

As I look out on all of you, I am reminded, once again, of how one life can affect so many. I recall the words of John Donne, the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. He wrote: ***“Every person's death diminishes me, for I am a part of humanity. I am not single and alone. No person is an island unto himself...Everything that you do affects me, and everything that I do affects you.”*** And then he wrote these powerful words, words with which most of us here are familiar: ***“Never send to ask for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee.”*** You see, in 17<sup>th</sup> Century England the Parson would ring the church bells to inform the community when someone had died. Donne is saying, “Don't ask who has died, for a part of you has died—the bell tolls for thee.” With Larry's passing, a piece of us has died—a piece of our Oriental community has died...

Here is one of the most brilliant conceptions of what human life is all about. We are all intertwined...We are all members one of another, which is the main theme that runs throughout the entire New Testament of the Bible. In the most deeply spiritual sense, no one is an island...And with the passing of

Larry, we are reminded, once again, of our interconnectedness, and how one life can affect so many.

One of my favorite poets is the Quaker, John Greenleaf Whittier, who wrote:

**Alas for him who never sees  
The stars shine through the cypress trees.  
Who hopeless lays his dead away,  
Nor looks to see the breaking day  
Across the mournful marbles play.  
Who hath not learned in hours of faith  
The truth that time and sense have known,  
That life is ever lord of death,  
And love can never lose its own.**

Life, I am convinced, is a continuum. Love is the constant, and when we are laid to rest for the last time in this physical world, as our friend Larry has been laid to rest, *the love will continue*. In the ***First Letter of John*** the author writes that God is *love*. If we believe that God is infinite, then love is infinite. I believe that the love we experience and the love that we express is constant. “Love can never lose its own,” wrote the poet—the love found in passion for life—the pain that we experience—the prayers through which we search the world of spirit, and the spiritual pilgrimage where the meaning of life can be discovered. Because of this love—the love that Larry has left behind in this physical world—he will always be with us.

One of the books that I discussed with Larry was titled, ***Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary*** by Marcus Borg. Toward the end of this book, Borg writes about “The Unending Conversation,” an idea borrowed from Kenneth Burke. He writes: ***“Being born is like entering a parlor where there’s already a conversation going on. The conversation began long before we were born, and it will continue long after we are gone. The conversation is about life itself—about what is real, what is worth paying attention to, how we should live, and what ‘this’ is all about. When we have listened long enough to have some idea of what the conversation is about, we join it ourselves. Then, in Burke’s words, ‘the hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.’”***

*The unending conversation* is not just about talk, nor is it limited to the intellectual few... We are all involved in the conversation. And Larry—He was very much in the middle of the earthly parlor where the conversation took place. On the morning of December 2<sup>nd</sup>, however, the hour grew late, and Larry departed. No longer will I hear the familiar, “Hey Jim!” when he would

call me, or his standard concluding question as I would leave my time with him to go home... “Jim, are you shoving off?” No longer will this community have the joy of seeing Captain Larry drive through town in his red convertible, waving at everyone he sees, and seeing his smiling face under the white beard as he played Santa Claus. Music Night at M and M’s will not be the same without Larry, and every charitable event in town will miss his generosity.

Yes, we do, indeed, feel his loss and miss his presence, for we are human. I am convinced, however, that Larry has already found another parlor in the next life where he is continuing the conversation...

And so, Captain Larry... ***Until next time, we wish you clear skies, fair winds, and calm seas...*** And those of us left in this world can find comfort in the belief that you, dear friend, are now at home with our God. Amen.